

VZCZCXRO5889
RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHPG #0432/01 2051531
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 241531Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1597
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0813
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1977
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAMDA/MDA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000432

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

EUR/CE AND EUR/RUS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EZ](#) [EUN](#)
SUBJECT: RELEASE OF MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY REVIEW: TIMING
IMPLICATIONS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mary Thompson-Jones for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: Senior Czech officials have consistently raised their concerns that any announcement of the results of the U.S. strategic policy review before the October 9-10 national elections could make this a campaign issue and might even affect the outcome of the elections themselves. Defense Minister Bartak told Charge Thompson-Jones on July 24 that an announcement before Czech elections "will be interpreted as a lack of respect for the Czech Republic from the United States." MFA Security Policy Deputy Director Petr Chalupicky, was even blunter and believes that announcing our decision even knowing that this could affect a national election, would send a chill through pro-Atlanticist leaders in Central Europe and the Baltics and that such an action might be read as a sign the U.S. was more concerned about its relationship with Russia than its smaller allies. End Summary.

Missile Defense - Makes the Security Relationship Tangible

12. (C) On July 24 the Charge met with Czech Defense Minister Martin Bartak to discuss the bilateral security relationship and ways to strengthen it. Bartak spoke about the proposed radar base, in addition to other topics. He characterized it as "something that went beyond just paper and made the security relationship tangible." He reminded us that Czechs "have invested much politically" in Missile Defense and that it would be important for both sides to "stay on the same page." While the CDA noted that the Missile Defense policy review was ongoing, Bartak commented that "we must carry on our security cooperation despite what's going on with Missile Defense."

Czech Officials Believe USG Announcement Could Influence Elections

13. (C) Currently the two major Czech political parties - Topolaneck's ODS (Civic Democrats) and Paroubek's CSSD (center-left Social Democrats) - are running even in the polls. So far this spring and summer Missile Defense has not been a major campaign issue as both of the leading parties see this issue as "on the shelf." To make an announcement in the lead-up to the election, however, would be to reintroduce the most divisive issue in Czech politics at a pivotal moment. Indeed, Minister Bartak predicted that Missile Defense would play a major role in the October 9-10 elections, saying he expected a "very severe" campaign climate. Bartak stated it was the Czech Embassy's understanding that a public announcement will come "the first

week of October." He said the ideal timing would be "after October 10, preferably the end of the month." He said an announcement before Czech elections "will be interpreted as a lack of respect for the Czech Republic from the United States."

¶4. (C) MFA Security Policy Deputy Director and future Czech NATO DCM Petr Chalupsky, was even more blunt and in a separate conversation with emboffs stated that any release of our Security Policy Review before October 10 would very likely make "USG commitment to the region" a front-and-center Czech national campaign issue which could also potentially tip the results of Czech elections. According to Chalupsky, to announce our decision even knowing that this could affect a national election, would send a chill through pro-Atlanticist leaders in Central Europe and the Baltics. He believes such an action might be read as a signal that the U.S. was more concerned about its relationship with Russia than its smaller allies. Thus, as Political Director Martin Povejsil told Senator Levin during their discussions in May of this year, "take your time."

The Open Letter - Gaining Attention or Creating Tension?

¶5. (SBU) While our decision on missile defense installations is not a comment on USG commitment to the region, many Central Europeans, and Czech officials in particular, see it this way. This is also how it is framed in the July 17 "Open Letter" from former President Vaclav Havel and others to President Obama. In the Charge's conversation with Minister

PRAGUE 00000432 002 OF 002

Bartak, she noted the importance of not allowing the intensity and frequency of cooperation and consultation on security matters to diminish, and referred to the considerable attention the July 16 open letter had drawn. Bartak immediately joked, "Just attention or tension?" While he said he had nothing to do with the letter, he believes it "reflects the perception here of U.S. foreign policy," particularly on missile defense.

¶6. (C) Comment: Embassy Prague strongly recommends delaying any announcement of the Security policy review until after the October 9-10 Czech elections. To do it before could have a profound negative impact on U.S. relations with a whole generation of pro-Atlanticist Czech officials. It would also re-introduce the single most divisive issue in Czech politics at the most delicate moment and undermine the election chances of those who went out on a limb to support U.S. policy. Center-rightists and those who subscribe to the views of the Havel/Walesa letter will feel twice betrayed - once on missile defense and once again on the disastrous timing of the decision. It will also play into fears that many in Central Europe have articulated that the U.S. administration is abandoning the region in favor of a Russian-centrist policy. While any release of the results of the review will have an impact on both Czech-U.S. relations and internal Czech politics, we can limit the negative consequences, by ensuring that we closely consult with Czech officials and any release not take place before elections.
Thompson-Jones